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R E M A R K S

ON THE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY,

WHO STYLE THEMSELVES

"THE FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE:"

AND

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT,

AS APPLICABLE TO THE

BRITISH CONSTITUTION.

IN TWO LETTERS TO A FRIEND.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

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IN TWO LETTERS

LONDON

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

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REMARKS
ON THE
PROCEEDINGS OF THE SOCIETY
WHO STYLE THEMSELVES
"THE FRIENDS OF THE PEOPLE."

LETTER I.

DEAR SIR,

WHEN the association of the "*Friends of the People*" first assembled at the Free-mason's Tavern, you expressed some degree of surprise at hearing that I disapproved of their resolutions; and you were pleased to assign

as the cause of your surprise, that you had always considered me as a friend to reform, and an advocate for civil and religious liberty. I hope ever to deserve those venerable names, while the former is directed at a proper time to the remedy of actual grievances, and the latter are combined with order and piety. My reasons for dissenting from the declaration of the Society, you will find at large in the following letter. They are not particular but general, and, therefore, at the same time that I give them to you, I give them likewise to the world.

It may be thought, perhaps, that the utility of this discussion is superseded by the late Royal Proclamation. But the Members of the Society openly assert, that the Proclamation is inapplicable to themselves, and were it even generally acknowledged to apply, it would not surely be improper to justify by argument the condemnation pronounced by authority.

REMARKS, &c.

IN the present crisis of European politics, and the present state of national affairs, the Resolutions of a Society in this kingdom, established for the purpose of obtaining a Parliamentary Reform, will naturally excite attention, and call for opposition or concurrence.

The Society in question assumes a plausible appearance. It proclaims itself under the fascinating title of an association of "The Friends to the People." Its declared object is reformation, and not revolution. Its address is drawn up with ingenuity and elegance, and the list of its Members certainly includes many respectable names.

This fair appearance, it is to be presumed, is not the veil of insidious design. Possessed of no powers to penetrate into the hearts of men, let us charitably infer from their professions that their motives are good. Candour

on the present occasion would induce us to conclude, that this Society is composed of persons, who are really impressed with a belief of subsisting evils in the present conduct of Government, and a desire to reform them: of persons, who perceive the spirit of revolution breathing in the writings, the discourses, and the public meetings of an active party in the kingdom;—of persons, who, perhaps, deprecate the consequences of a direct attack upon the constitution, and are willing to avert the blow by a removal of those imagined evils which they consider likely to invite it.

This, surely, is the fairest supposition which can be made on the motives of their conduct. But on subjects of importance it is not sufficient that the motive can be justified. Serious designs are amenable, not only to the bar of conscience, but also to the tribunal of wisdom; and the fullest assurance of good intention in the proposers of any measure should not hinder us from examining with caution the nature and consequences of their proposition.

These

These Gentlemen openly avow in their address, that the views by which they are actuated are strictly consistent with the principles of the constitution: that they aim to reform its abuses, not to derange its system. This may be true, with reference to their own ideas on the subject. But while charity forbids us to consider them as the tools, and conviction of their abilities prevents us from supposing them the dupes, of others, it is no derogation either from candour or discernment to contemplate them, as the unintentional friends of a faction, whose object is not to reform, but to destroy.

I mean not to assert or to imply what I shall not endeavour to prove; the assertions and implications of an anonymous writer must rest entirely on the strength of his arguments: he has no weight of character to stamp them with value, or give them currency in the world.

The declaration of the Society crosses me in a questionable shape, and I must speak to it. I must speak to it on the general reasons for reform; on the present necessity for any
parti-

particular alteration; and on the probable consequences of such alteration; as they may affect the British Constitution, and the welfare of the kingdom at large.

Reformation is a sacred term: it is the duty of man both in private and in public life. It ought to form a chief occupation of the citizen, and a principal employment of the statesman. Half the proceedings of a good government are actual reforms. To remove evils as they arise is one great end of its institution. Good does not always present itself to be secured, but evils ever occur to be corrected. To some kind of reformation, therefore, as highly necessary at this, and at all times, I shall readily subscribe, as long as evils and abuses exist. But it does not follow that I should subscribe to the declaration of "The Friends of the People." I must first be convinced that the circumstances they propose to correct are evils;—that they are evils of magnitude and importance; that they are not counteracted in practice;—that the projected alteration will remove them, without substituting as many, and as great in their room;—that it will not itself
subvert

subvert the constitution, nor forward the plans of those who avowedly desire to overthrow it. All these particulars must be proved, before the real patriot will be disposed to allow, that change is necessary;—that the change suggested by the Society is reformation;—that its designs are consistent with the welfare of the state, or that they are not calculated to produce confusion and anarchy.

In the first place, I think it may be asserted with safety, that there is no evil in politics, but the actual unhappiness of the people. A good government naturally promotes the welfare of a nation, and the converse of the proposition is equally obvious and true. What, then, are the questions which prudence suggests on the supposition of political evil? Is not this the language of political inquiry? Are the people unhappy? Do they suffer from this pretended abuse? Does it affect their civil liberty, their security, their comfort? If it can be proved that it does, a practical evil exists which calls for reform. If it does not, however the circumstance complained of may deviate from theoretical perfection, it is no real and substantial evil.

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It

It must be acknowledged that there are many defects in the best theories of government ; but these defects are evils only as they are supposed likely to be felt in practice ; and if it can be proved from experience that the obliquity of system is productive of no practical unhappiness, it deserves not to be branded with the name of evil, and consequently it does not invoke the spirit of reformation.*

It cannot, moreover, be denied that those imperfections of theory which appear most likely to produce practical evil, are frequently, and, perhaps, generally counteracted in execution. If in the nature of things there be a proneness to corruption, there is likewise in the constitution of the human mind a tendency to oppose this inclination, and to confine the exercise of authority within its proper boundaries. The corrective, which is not to be found in system, is often supplied in practice.

* It may be observed, that regular and proportional systems are seldom or never applicable to the affairs of men. Our best instruments are irregular in their formation. The notes of harmony and the measure of time are derived from the various combinations of mechanism in an organ and a watch.

But

But granting for argument's sake, that certain parts of a constitution do produce some degree of evil, the next question to be resolved is, do they not likewise produce some portion of good? And as the good or the evil preponderates, we must then argue for their continuation or removal.

It is also highly necessary to examine, whether the parts supposed to be defective, are not so intimately interwoven with the constitution, that they must stand or fall together. If this be the case, and the constitution be professedly good as a whole, the duty of the patriot is obvious. None but a madman would induce the certainty or even incur the imminent hazard of destroying his body, for the sake of removing a complaint in one of its members.

It is a lamentable truism that no human institution is free from evil. Our choice in life must be directed, not so much by the greatest certainty of good, as by the least probability of ill. This increases the hazard of subsequent change, as well as the difficulty of original decision, and the generality of evil proves that the bare existence of it is not

sufficient to warrant alteration. It is the misfortune of an enthusiast to pine in the shades of established system, and to bask only in the light of ideal reform; but it is the characteristic of a wise and temperate man, to be content, on the whole, with that mixture of clouds and sunshine, which the present constitution of things exhibits, which he perceives to be consonant to the general course of nature, and which he finds may be employed to the important purposes of life.

But independent of these considerations, when we balance the advantages and disadvantages of alteration against the good and evil of establishments, change itself must be taken into the account to swell the sum of inconveniences.

Whatever good is ultimately effected by change, it is certainly productive of much immediate evil. Change excites contest, and inflames animosity. It creates disgust, disquiet, and confusion. It is, therefore, the dictate of reason, as well as the mandate of religion, that "we ought not to meddle
"with them who are given to change."

I think,

I think, my friend, reflections similar to these (whenever they occur) will check the spirit of theoretical reform. It is a spirit, indeed, natural to the human mind, and frequently originating from the noblest motives; but it is so easily assumed for interested designs, so liable to be perverted from its primary intention, and so prone to produce unpremeditated evil, that it requires to be repressed by the curb of prudence, or to be guided by the steady hand of no ordinary skill.

It is time to apply these abstract observations to the case before us. Let us examine by them the declaration and address of the Society, and see how far the real friend of the people is warranted in withholding his support from their measures. We must first consider the statement of evils they present, and next the proposed alteration, with their probable consequences.

The declaration then directly asserts, that inadequacy of representation, and want of freedom and frequency in elections, are evils in the British Government which call
for

for reform. Before we can determine that the representation is, or is not inadequate, we must be informed what representation implies, and for what purposes it is adopted into the British Constitution. On these important points I should be happy to know the opinion of the Society ; but as the members are silent on a subject which deserves to be thoroughly examined, they will excuse me if I turn to their democratic brothers in reform to solicit information. With many of these I have lived in habits of friendly intercourse, and if I know my own heart, I would readily co-operate in any scheme to increase their happiness, which did not go the length of sacrificing to their desires the Constitution of my country. But I am not irradiated by their philosophy ; I wander, on the contrary, with these pretended luminaries of the age, as with the twinklings stars of other systems, whose rays are too feeble to direct my steps.

These advocates for revolution dwell with rapture on a system of perfect representation, which a man of common understanding may own without a blush, he wants faculties to
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comprehend, or taste to relish. Its excellencies are so subtle that they escape observation, while its faults are gross, weighty, and notorious. Complete representation is the idol of novel politicians; the acute author of "the Rights of Man" bows down before it with the same blind veneration as the weakest and most ignorant of his adherents. But what deity resides within it? or what is its hallowed form but the fanciful image of ideal good?

Representation would imply in strictness that all the individuals who compose a people should speak by the voice of a delegated few. This is the speculative scheme, but what is the practical application? The savage republican begins by excluding one sex from all share in government, either personal or representative. He thus narrows the definition of mankind, confines the privileges of freedom to the exercise of power, and cuts off at once the more pleasing, more virtuous, and equally intelligent half of the human race from all participation in "its natural and inalienable rights!" I use not this argument ludicrously. I consider it as a real confutation
 I of

of the visionary schemes of democracy : a Macauley or a Wolfstoncraft I should suppose would hesitate to allow that men are born to freedom and women to slavery.* But females alone are not excluded from this perfect commonwealth ; the childhood and adolescence of the more worthy gender are considered as undeserving of representation. Now on what grounds do the assertors of the Rights of *Man* thus proceed to reduce the sum of representable citizens ? Clearly on the supposition (whether presumptuous or well founded) of inability to judge, or propensity to be biased, in those whom they reject. Let this reasoning be extended as far as it will apply, and it will on as just principles exclude all, who from infirmity, ignorance, or folly,—from self interest, par-

* It would be difficult to prove any natural inferiority in the women except in point of strength ; even in this, inferiority is not universal, and were it admitted by the democrat as a reason for exclusion, it would render corporeal strength the criterion of personal freedom and happiness ; a concession which would ruin the system of equality at once. As to occupations, the ladies might maintain with great appearance of truth, that the management of a house and family, which commonly falls to their share, is as consistent with the task of legislation as most of the usual employments of men.

tiality,

tiality, or vice, are liable to judge, or predisposed to choose, amiss. How large a portion of mankind will be comprehended under these descriptions ! It is no reply to assert that it would be an invidious, an improper, an impossible attempt, to point out those of our fellow citizens who ought to be excluded from representation by ignorance or vice. I am ready to confess that it would, and they must consequently be admitted ; but if it be necessary to the adopted plan of these reformers, to admit those to franchise who by an extent of their own reasoning ought to be debarred from its privileges, it is a fair deduction to infer that the plan itself is defective in its principle. Unless the majority of a nation, told by the head, were good and wise, I do not see how actual representation could be consistent either with wisdom or goodness.

But without using the weapons supplied by democracy in practice against democracy in principle ;—without pushing the self-suggested arguments of these speculators to their utmost extent, let us be content to trace the progress of their system as far as they

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will

will permit it to be extended. Of the people, thus reduced in number by their own exclusions, all cannot unite in the choice of the same delegates;—the majority therefore must elect : this majority may consist of few, and by consequence nearly half of these remnants of democracy, these *reliquæ Danaum* will be unrepresented. Of those who agree in the choice of the representative it is highly probable that he will not speak the real sentiments of most ; he will, therefore, not only be obnoxious to those who opposed, but to many of those who elected him ; and after all the sublime eulogies on a perfect national representation, the number of those who are actually represented will be reduced to a most inconsiderable minority.

Neither is this all ; representation may be considered in two lights, as simple or complex ; that is, as immediate or progressive. In the immediate representation of a populous country, either the constituents are so numerous that we cannot suppose their delegate will speak the sentiments of many, or the number of representatives is so large that we cannot expect to find harmony and de-

cision in their councils. In progressive or subdivided representation, which is the favourite system of the age, the delegate has no connection with the primary electors. He is the representative of clubs or societies who are chosen to elect him. To these clubs he is under obligation, but he is under no obligation to the lower orders of the people ; of these clubs he may speak the sentiments, but it is not necessary that he should speak the sentiments of their electors. How is this evil to be remedied ? Can the delegate be amenable to the people ? Certainly not ; for such a system would virtually render the the people immediate electors. Can the societies be punished for their choice ? Certainly not ; for the societies would not then be free to choose : they may, however, be re-elected, they may be composed of different persons. Undoubtedly they may, but the members of the new society will proceed to the choice of a delegate who must consider himself as indebted and answerable solely to themselves. I cannot conceive a system in which, under the name of freedom, the lower classes of the people might be trampled upon with more facile impunity.

The scheme of perfect representation, or, (as it is sometimes called) the organization of a numerous people, appears, when examined, to be delusive and impossible. It may float in the brain of a visionary, but no attempt can be made to reduce it to practice, without giving rise to evils as numerous and as great as those which originate from any other mode of government. It is an Utopian scheme, suited, perhaps, to an assembly of angels or of perfect Christians, but by no means adapted to the general character of man.

I do not impute to the members of the Society, such chimerical plans of representation as have lately been presented to the world by *illuminated* politicians : I am persuaded better things of them. Either they have not given themselves the trouble to think deeply on the subject, or they have thought differently upon it. But as some more complete system was certainly suggested to their imaginations, when they presumed to call the present inadequate, and as they have withheld from the world their ideas on the subject, I was obliged only to state and
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combat those with which I was acquainted. Let us now contemplate representation in that sober, rational, and useful light, in which it is regarded and adopted by the Constitution of England.

Representation then, I apprehend, is considered by this Constitution, not as the origin but as the controul of government. Government was established before representation began ; our wise forefathers saw as clearly as their descendants, that the happiness of a nation ought to be the chief object of government ; and they saw too, that government was very liable to lose sight of this object, unless the people were protected from tyranny ; unless they had an opportunity of stating their grievances and expressing their desires. But they were not mad enough to form the inverted, anarchical, and ridiculous idea, of a people governing their governors ; first electing whom they pleased to rule them, and afterwards displacing them at will, if they did not rule them as they approved.

In the first place, they established certain definite, wise, and sacred laws, as the venerable

rable ground works of all judicial proceedings. These laws ensured and still ensure, to every individual, however low in station, or destitute of property, freedom, security, and relief, from oppression. These are the charters of liberty and happiness, of which the people of England have a right to boast; and till the British Constitution be changed, it is next to a moral impossibility that these noble charters should be wilfully infringed. But in the next place, as the property of individuals is liable to be applied to the exigencies of the state, our ancestors considered it as equitable, that those who were taxed should likewise be represented. It was settled, therefore, that the owners of small property should elect the possessors of larger, on whom the weight of taxes would fall in a heavy proportion—to whom the reasons and necessity for taxation should be stated by the servants of the Crown, and from whom an assent to their imposition should be previously obtained. This was the origin of the House of Commons. And here it may be observed with every appearance of truth, that our Constitution, as far as relates to the representation of districts, has become more and more popular

popular in theory every year of its continuance. The original qualification of a freeholder was, at least, twelve times greater than it is at the present day. Our forefathers (if they reasoned at all upon the subject) saw the great probability there was, that the poorer and more dependent class would always be biassed or corrupted by those who could gratify and employ them. They, therefore, fixed the standard of franchise on a competency which they hoped might secure independence. But with the decrease in the value of money there has certainly been in this respect a gradual change in our Constitution. The Society who declaim so loudly against the innovations of time, must determine, if this be a sufficient change to justify reform.

The House of Commons, then, was first instituted, that men possessed of property might point out, both for themselves and their electors, the hardships of particular taxes, and might give their assent to those which were equitable and necessary. But after its institution it gradually increased in power, and the people with it in safety and happiness.

When

When men of large property were to be elected, it was impossible that the people should not elect many, who had improved their natural talents by all the advantages of education; who had matured their opinions by leisure and study, and who, by the application of their minds to the science of politics, were able to devise schemes and forward plans of public benefit and improvement. The lower House soon became an essential part of our rising Constitution. It not only represented the complaints of the people, withstood the tyranny, or consented to the taxes of government, but it proposed many important regulations and amendments, which, without the existence of a House of Commons, might never have occurred to the thoughts of a sovereign and his counsellors. Such were the powers originally possessed, or subsequently obtained, by the representatives of the people. With the enlargement of their authority and use, their dignity increased; they did not consider themselves as the mere mouths of their constituents, but as heads appointed to consult and deliberate for the nation at large. The House of Commons as it exists at present, is partly representative

sentative and partly legislative ; in the former light, it is obliged to present the petitions and complaints of the people ; in the latter, it is not bound to abide by their instructions ; and the reason is obvious. Of their own happiness, the people are competent judges ; they feel, and they should state their grievances. Of apparent good, they see the advantage, and ought to express their wishes to obtain it : but they are not the best judges of the mode in which evil is to be amended, nor of the means by which good is to be procured.

If this statement of the intention, the duties and the province of a House of Commons, be founded in truth, what inference can be drawn from hence to determine the question of adequate representation ? Perfect systems of representation, we have seen, are ideal, and inapplicable to the nature of man. May not that, on the contrary, be pronounced adequate to the purposes of freedom, happiness, and government, which collects together a considerable number of persons out of the mass of the people, and from every part of the kingdom ; chosen by men of dif-

ferent ranks and opinions, of various tenures and qualifications ; possessed of property sufficient to interest them in the welfare of the state, and of talents sufficient to fit them for the task of legislation ; diffusive enough to be acquainted with all the wants and wishes of the people, and numerous enough to debate with deliberation and prudence on the multiform objects of government ? I have omitted the essential quality of worth, because I would not venture to assert, that it is confined to any peculiar mode of representation. But under the foregoing description we contemplate a House of Commons, which represents, perhaps, in the highest practicable degree the property of the nation, the Members of which are connected with the people by the same interests, passions, and manners, and by the numerous relations of natural and civil life ; who (in the absence of other motives) are more likely to place their ambition in flattering the wishes of the people, than in supporting the measures of Government, and who, whether they continue in power, or sink again into the common mass, are liable to submit to the laws they have

have functioned, and the taxes they have imposed.

Let us likewise recollect, that while the subordinate parts of the community are thus connected with the Government, the very lowest class of the people, though not avowedly represented, are yet as much so in reality as four-fifths of the actual electors, and as much so as their dependent state will allow under any form of representation; that though they possess no property, they are capable of obtaining it; that while they are destitute of the goods of fortune, they have a title to public support, and are equally protected from injury with the highest order in the state, by the certain, acknowledged, and immutable axioms of law.

I am not at all more inclined to resort to authority, than the Society whose views I am considering; but as they have begun their address by appealing to the opinions of respectable men, I may be allowed to strengthen my arguments by the language of PALEY, to whose well-digested observations as much credit and deference is due as to the occa-

sional dictate of any eminent statesmen, who, from various motives, might sometimes incline to forward a reform in Parliament. The following are his observations on this important subject : * “ No prudent statesman
 “ would subvert long-established, or even
 “ settled rules of representation, without a
 “ prospect of procuring wiser or better representatives. This, then, being well observed, let us, before we seek to obtain any
 “ thing more, consider duly what we have.
 “ We *have* a House of Commons composed of 558 Members, in which number
 “ are found the most considerable landholders and merchants in the kingdom ;
 “ the heads of the army, the navy, and the law ; the occupiers of great offices in the
 “ state ; together with many private individuals, eminent by their knowledge, eloquence, and activity. Now, if the country be not safe in such hands, in whose
 “ may it confide its interests ? If such a number of such men be liable to the influence
 “ of corrupt motives, what assembly of men
 “ will be secure from the same danger ? Does

* Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy,
 vol. ii. p. 220.

“ any

“ any new scheme of representation promise
 “ to collect together more wisdom, or to
 “ produce firmer integrity ?”

But it may be said that this statement, enforced by this authority, is unsatisfactory, because it overlooks the power possessed by the Nobility and the Crown in the original nomination or subsequent patronage of Members.

The advocates for reform may exclaim—
 We will grant that your reasoning is conclusive as far as it extends. We have formed no chimerical plan of representation ; we know too well the nature of man to suppose that a perfect system is practicable ; we admit, that such a form as you have described is adequate to all the purposes of good government ; but is the House of Commons really such a representation ? Does it not comprehend many Members who are liable to be influenced by the Crown and the Nobles ? It is not so much of defects as of redundancies that we complain ; it is not with the imperfection of representation that we quarrel, but with the influence which arises
 I from

from the imperfection. Lop off the rotten boughs from the British oak, and we wish not to destroy the tree, or to plant another in its stead. I believe I have stated this argument in its full force; I should be sorry to misrepresent, or to deceive. It must be granted, that the influence does exist to a certain degree, and it may possibly be considered by many as an imperfection that calls for reform. But let us examine before we decide: let us not be led away by the sound of a word, or the delusion of an idea; many arguments may be brought to shew, that this obliquity is not positive evil: in adducing some of them I am ready to own my obligations to the authority I have before quoted, partly for the train of argument; and partly for the original idea.

It was certainly never intended, that the House of Commons alone should govern the nation; to maintain that it was, would be an unconstitutional and a treasonable doctrine; it was intended only, that in this House the Ministers of the Crown should find a proper controul upon their measures.

But,

But, in spite of this acknowledged truth, it is a fact notorious to every man at all versed in the history of his country, that the Commons, led away by the spirit of democracy, at one time—with slow and silent steps at others—with rapid strides advanced at length to an eminence of power from whence they overawed the Nobility, and threatened the existence of the Monarchy itself. When the House of Peers was dissolved, and the Crown struck off with the head that wore it, then began the reign of republican anarchy, which the advocates for revolution are labouring to revive, but which the aristocratical sense of the nation at that period rose indignant to suppress, and of which a rational posterity have never ceased to deprecate the return. Through the spirit and temper of the times, the rights of the Sovereign and the Nobility were at length restored, but the Commons resembled an ocean lulled into a calm; their latent powers continued, and have since been amply enlarged through many obvious and many imperceptible channels.

Such

Such vast authority, naturally tending to increase, required a permanent balance, and it finds it in influence. Now, if the Constitution ought to be preserved, the powers which would destroy it must necessarily be checked. I mean not to enter into the theoretical question, Whether a Parliament more independent of the Crown, with less extensive powers, would have better secured the end, and preserved the frame of government ; but I do not scruple to repeat, that if a House of Commons be possessed of powers to overturn the fabric of the Constitution, it ought, by some means or other, to be controuled in the exertion of them : influence, then, answering the purpose of such controul, operates constitutionally, and is to be considered rather as the preventative of evil than as evil itself : but influence does not deserve condemnation, if it act partly with other views than those of preserving the form of the Constitution. A Ministry is liable to be opposed from various motives besides an attachment to the public good ; there are many factious demagogues, both in and out of the House, ready to take advantage of the
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credulity and admiration of the people, to thwart the measures of Government, and to forward their own schemes of avarice or ambition. Parties are easily formed, and more easily led; the love of power, the impatience of controul, the natural tendency to opposition, the desire of popular applause, and many other passions equally strong, will always arm a formidable body against the executive and administrative authority: if a Minister, therefore, had no support but the wisdom of his measures, the best of Ministers would frequently be opposed with success, and the stability of Government would be no more. The influence which merely counteracts this propensity, which produces a neutrality on every proposition, or, perhaps, we may say, an inclination to support the servants of the Crown, ought not, for these reasons, to be hastily arraigned: it gives vigour to Government, and restrains a spirit which is too apt to irritate and delude the people: but I defend influence only as it is employed for these definite and useful purposes; and by the influence I defend, I mean only, with the moral and judicious Paley, that of gratitude and expectation: all other

influence is dishonourable both in principle and practice; yet it must be allowed, that even the influence of wealth cannot be particularly objected to Government, because it is alike common in the county and the burgh, alike imputable to the friends of the Minister and the partisans of opposition; alike inseparable from the essence of election and the frame of human nature: neither is it to be supposed, that the individual Members, thus attached to the Government by gratitude or expectation, are therefore destitute of worth, or inattentive to the well-being of the community; an accurate examination of mankind will hinder us from drawing such a conclusion. It is not, perhaps, more likely that the friends of Administration should be led into measures hostile to the welfare of the people, than that the opposite side of the House should embrace designs inimical to the existence of the Constitution.

It may, perhaps, be asserted with truth, that since the reign of imputed influence, no important question has been carried in the House of Commons, about which the minds of men who were qualified to judge have

not been greatly divided, and on which the measure of Government may not have been defended on as apparently rational grounds as the doctrine of opposition.

I have thus endeavoured to shew, that the present representation is not inadequate to the purposes for which the democratic part of the Constitution was instituted ; and that the influence which is ascribed to it as a flagrant abuse may be defended as a necessary check upon overweening power.

If it should be urged, that though the powers of the House of Commons require an opposing weight to preserve the equilibrium of government, yet that this weight is too apt to preponderate and sink down into evil, let us next inquire if this evil is not likely to be counteracted in practice : and to determine this point, it is sufficient only to enumerate the difficulties with which a Minister has to contend, who would carry a measure manifestly contrary to the real interests of the people ; he has to contend with the powerful voice of opposition, aided not only by the charms of eloquence, but by the

force of truth ; he has to contend with a band of respectable senators, who, though generally attached to Administration, yet glory in a virtuous independence ; he has to contend with those nominees of government who are possessed of virtue and integrity ; he has to contend with the dread of impeachment, which threatens to destroy him ; he has to contend with the voice of a numerous body of men, who, from talents, sense, and situation, are competent to judge on political subjects, and who, through the channel of a pamphlet, or the resolutions of a meeting, are enabled to publish their opinions to the world ; he has to contend with the voice of the multitude, who are easily excited to join in any cry against their governors ; and, lastly, he has to contend with his own permanent interest, which is not only connected with the happiness of the people, but is liable to be shaken even by their unfounded dissatisfaction. If any man will still maintain that material danger is to be apprehended from the power of a Minister in the House of Commons, I can argue with him no longer on the subject.

Such

Such a representation, involving some imperfections, with provisions to counteract them, may not satisfy the hot-headed advocate for theoretical excellence ; but I am disposed to think, it will satisfy every moderate and thinking man, who is inclined to make allowances for the general prevalence of evil, and aspires only to insure an actual predominance of good.

I come now to the consideration of the other heads of complaint which are stated in the Declaration of the Society ; they are partly involved in the subject I have just been examining, but they well deserve to be separately considered : these are, the want of freedom and frequency in elections. On the first of these points I am disposed, in some measure, though on different grounds, to agree with the Society. In the election of representatives there is a great necessity for reform ; not because Parliament does not speak the sense of the people as much as is practicable and necessary, but because elections (as generally conducted) corrupt the morals, injure the health, and relax the industry of the nation. These are, indeed, glaring and im-

important evils, and they are evils most frequent in those elections which are nominally most free, because there is the greatest competition, more arts are practised, and more votes are sold; yet of these evils, from the pretended friends of the people, we hear but little; they meet with no decided disapprobation.

To correct these disorders, many guards and preventatives exist in our laws, which require only to be called forth into practice to produce their effect; but it is impossible that these alone should be competent to the task of reformation; men will find means to elude those ties which would restrain their selfish inclinations. Let the reform begin at the proper end; the freedom of election depends more on the character of the candidate than on the manner of electing; if the representative will not corrupt, the people cannot be corrupted.

But it is a melancholy circumstance, that the dependent state of the lower order of freeholders and freemen, the force of custom, the heat of competition, and the desire of
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success, offer both to the electors, and the candidates, a temptation to bias and be biased, too strong to be often resisted with energy and success. This corruption is by no means to be confined to cases of absolute bribery. There are as many other fraudulent methods of obtaining votes as there are other passions in the human mind besides the love of wealth : that flattery which on such occasions is used only to seduce ; that undeserved praise or abuse of Ministers which is so lavishly bestowed ; those false promises and professions which are so liberally employed, are so many modes of corruption more dangerous from disguise. Whoever observes with attention the disorders in popular elections, must trace them to their causes in the human heart.

Yes, I will acknowledge with the Society, that elections are not free ; but how are they to be rendered so ? It is absurd to talk of a reform in Parliament as securing the freedom of election ; the evil lies beyond the reach of Legislation. To effectuate this purpose entirely, it is of little consequence that you alter the mode of choice, you must improve the nature of man : as long as his choice is liable

able to be influenced by any motive but reason, as a rational being, his election is not free. He is a slave to his passions or his interests, his hopes or his fears. The freedom of election depends in a very great degree on the morals of a nation ; it results from the prevalence of private worth, as much as the diffusion of public spirit. Those principles which tend to improve the heart, and inform the head of man, tend to render him independent. Let these, then, be inculcated by precept, and enforced by example : here let the zeal of reformation be exerted ; its motives will be noble, and its success will be glorious.

As to the greater frequency of elections, the question has been so ably canvassed on various occasions since the passing of the septennial bill, that the principal arguments pro and con are already before the public, and most men, perhaps, have made up their minds upon the subject. With regard to the bill itself, I will not pretend, in the first instance, to vindicate such a stretch of authority ; but having once passed into a law, and being now recognized as part of the constitution, the weight

weight of argument seems to be strongly in favour of its continuance. As a competent acquaintance with the forms and rules of the House is highly necessary to the Members, as long practice and habit are requisite to increase their information, and to enable them to deliver their sentiments with confidence, and as a dissolution of Parliament puts an end to the most important business of the nation, Government would lose much and gain nothing by a change in this respect : it would be rendered unstable, unintelligent, and weak. While elections, on the other hand, are productive of such flagrant and invariable evils as they generally excite, there is little doubt but the country would be more injured than benefited by the alteration.

I have now examined those pretended evils which are condemned by the declaration of the Society, and which it is the object of their Association to remove. On the truth of the foregoing observations, and the influence they should have on practice at the present time, I leave the wise and the reflecting to draw their own deductions. To *their* decision I shall readily submit.

It is my next wish to consider the desired alterations of the reformers, both as to their mode and their probable consequences.

Had these gentlemen come forward with any specific plan of pretended improvement, they would have met with determined opposition, or decided support : but from their first public proceedings, we are left only to infer, that they wish for some changes in those particulars which they have stigmatised with the name of abuses. The mode of change, then, we cannot contemplate, but we are acquainted with the principal object of it, and we can therefore reason on its consequences by considering the object as attained.

Let us then suppose that such a change has taken place in our representation, that the Commons are no longer liable to be biased on any occasion by the influence of the Crown. What will be the result ? Influence will still remain—an influence of a different kind, but more dangerous to the existence of the Constitution, and the order of Government. Demagogues will infallibly arise among the representatives of the people, greedy of power,
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and fond of popular applause, whose talents, resisted by no opposite energy, will draw a majority to their side. Such is the natural love of fame, the desire of authority, the tendency to licentiousness, the stimulus of self-interest, and the readiness to follow a leader of abilities, that we must suppose the Members of a popular Assembly to be more than men if they are not frequently actuated by many of these motives. Whenever a cry is excited in the nation for artful purposes, or arises from particular events, the Members of such a House of Commons will be driven into criminal compliances, with the caprice of the day. As their ambition will be confined within certain limits, they will seek to perpetuate and enlarge their own power, by augmenting that of their order, and they will endeavour to shew their attachment to the people, by thwarting the measures of Government.

The Ministers of the King then will come down to the House, but they will meet there with determined opposition. They will be told that they are the minions of a court; the people will be flattered at their expence, and

their measures will be branded with every malicious imputation which selfish design, personal animosity, or vain-glorious ambition, can excite. The public business will of course stand still for a while ; the King will be obliged to choose new servants, who may be again opposed with success, or drawn over to the popular cause.

The affairs of the nation will thus gradually fall into the hands of a junto, who will be by no means the chosen servants of the Crown, and who may, or may not, be fitted for the task of legislation. Their measures may consequently be rash, ill grounded, and subversive of the Constitution : where are they to meet with opposition ? In the House of Peers, in the negative of the Crown ; here they undoubtedly will. But let us trace its effects.

The Commons, in contempt of the Minister, will carry their measures through the lower House. But the influence which was before exerted there, will now be found in the Lords : no connection or attachment will subsist between the two Houses. On the contrary,

trary, it is probable that a virulent animosity will arise between them. Without supposing the Nobility to be instigated by the *esprit du corps*, or the dislike of innovation, it is impossible but they must attribute many of the proceedings in the Commons to a desire of increasing their own power, to the influence of a party at the expence of good Government, or to the popular phrenzy of the day. It is, therefore, impossible that they should consent to pass them.

Here then is a ground of contest and disagreement between the two orders in the state, which would necessarily put a stop to the business of the empire, and throw the country into confusion; and this only in the ordinary train of legislation. But should the Commons, composed according to novel ideas of representation, attempt to make alterations in the form of the Constitution, from the House of Lords and from the Crown they would undoubtedly meet with firm and strenuous resistance. What would be the probable result? The Commons, inflated by pride and popularity, adopting, perhaps, some of the visionary doctrines of the age, might call themselves

selves the only legal-part of Government; and
 foiled in their attempts to govern, might be-
 gin to exert their latent powers to bow the
 Nobility and the Sovereign to their will. Who
 has forgotten the time when they voted the
 House of Lords useless and dangerous, and
 who will ever forget the consequences? The
 instruments of destruction are still in their
 hands, and if wielded by a democratic spirit,
 what force can resist the blow? Nothing but
 the influence, for such obvious reasons ar-
 raigned and condemned, has strength enough
 to hold back the uplifted arm. Let the Com-
 mons withhold the supplies, let them refuse
 to pass the mutiny act, and they either throw
 the country into anarchy, or the whole power
 of the State into their own House. They may
 then have the nominal forms of a House of
 Peers and a Sovereign, but the one will exist
 from that moment, as the tame and unresist-
 ing register, and the other as the submissive
 executioner of their decrees.*

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* The King will of course attempt to to dissolve
 the Parliament, but the Members of such a House
 may oppose their own dissolution: and were a new
 Parliament elected in the same manner and on the
 same principles, it would probably be composed of
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What then will become of the British Constitution? It will vanish, and a republic will start up in its stead.

Is this a deduction of fancy, or is it the probable effect of theoretical schemes? Can any wise man lay his hand on his heart, and say, that these consequences are not likely to ensue; and can any man, unsophisticated by the madness of the age, maintain that these consequences would be productive of improvement, happiness, and peace?

At all events, if the probability of such an issue cannot be denied, it affords a decisive answer to the "Friends of the People," who solemnly profess in their resolutions a sincere attachment to the Constitution, and who, by the voice of their most eloquent partisans, have disclaimed in the House of Commons every design inconsistent with its principles.

nearly the same individuals, and it would be stimulated to the exertion and enlargement of those powers which it possessed, by all the motives which actuated the last, and by those additional incitements which would spring from disappointed pride and resentful opposition. The dreaded effect, therefore, will be postponed only for a short time.

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The British Constitution, indeed, deserves their unfeigned admiration : it is a Constitution not to be treated with levity, or invaded with rashness : it is a Constitution formed like the mind of a wise man, in which the nobler parts of his nature predominate ; originally endued with certain powers, some of which were necessarily called forth into action before they were balanced by the rest ; educated by adversity ; early adopting sacred principles of conduct ; gradually improved by the resistance of evil, and the acquisition of good ; insensibly meliorated by experience and application ; struggling at different times with the tyranny of opposite passions ; careful to avoid extremes ; sensible of the use as well as the danger of habit ; submissive to the dictates of a Supreme Being ; it attains at length to that state of practicable excellence which renders it a comfort to the possessor, and a blessing to all within the sphere of its influence. The republican systems, on the contrary, resemble the minds of those who are governed rather by their desires than their reason : their theories are plausible, and calculated to attract the generality of mankind ; they affect to follow nature ; they abuse restraint ; they are led by

by the intoxicating sounds of liberty and pleasure; they exalt self-importance; they despise experience; they are averse to restrictions of religion; and they sink into brutal licentiousness, confusion, and misery.

If these metaphors be appropriate, the difference between the British Constitution and a democracy is the difference between wisdom and folly, between virtue and vice.

It remains only that we consider the time at which these reforming propositions are brought forward; a part of the subject to which the Society profess to have paid the greatest attention, before they determine in the affirmative. Yet, on this point, I feel myself disposed to differ from them in the most unqualified manner.

If there be a time when reform is least necessary, and alteration most dangerous, it is the present. If there be a time when a nation possesses in the highest degree the materials of happiness—when the mass of the people have the greatest reason to be content

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with their condition, and most likely to suffer from a change, it is the present.

Have we not a Monarch on the throne who really deserves to be addressed as the father of the people? Have we not a Ministry in office, under whom the public debt has been diminished, and the country has risen to an unexampled state of power and prosperity? Have we not a band of Senators, as illustrious for talents, humanity, and patriotism, as any period our history can boast? Are not all the poor and helpless in the kingdom maintained by the vast income of legal charity? Do not husbandry and trade employ every arm which is capable of labour, and every hand which is guided by ingenuity? Are not the important blessings of instruction, of freedom, of security, effectually guaranteed to every individual, by the laws of the land and the nature of the Government? In short, are not the English happy, or ought they not to be so? And is this a time for innovation? Is this a time to justify the murmurs of discontent, and the virulence of abuse?

Perhaps

Perhaps there never was a period in which what is sometimes called the voice of the people, was more attended to than the present ; that is, there never was a period in which political knowledge was more widely diffused, and in which the opinions of moderate parties and sensible individuals had more influence on the operations of Government.* The cry
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* I cannot help thinking that the late conduct of Administration on the Russian business will prove the truth of this remark, though it has been often adduced as an argument that the Commons do not speak the sense of the people. It is undoubtedly a part of our Constitution that war should originate with the Crown. It is, I confess, one of the most dangerous of royal prerogatives ; but the Commons are well armed against it by the power of withholding the supplies. Now, surely, if the regal prerogative be acknowledged, all that can be expected by the people, is, that Government should not persist in a war which is contrary to the enlightened sense and permanent interests of the nation. The armament commenced on a principle which was once the darling object of an Englishman ; the preservation of the balance of power, the degradation of undue aggrandizement. It is too much to say that the majorities were corrupt, who, on this once popular principle consented to the preparations for a war which the Crown had a right to commence. But the ideas of the English have undergone a rapid change, perhaps for the better. The love of glory and continental influence have given way to the love of wealth, and the love of ease. As soon as these ideas were generally expressed, or rather as soon as a violent opposition was excited against the war, it was

for reform is by no means a certain proof of its necessity ; it may be raised, either for interested purposes, or from mistaken motives, by a small party in the State, while the majority of the nation are content with their condition ; and this I sincerely believe to be the case at present. I am sorry likewise to add, and experience I think will confirm the observation, that men generally act like cowards on these occasions : they give importance to objects which are far from being formidable, and then boast of their prowess in venturing to attack them : they magnify evils which exist no longer : they talk the loudest when there is little danger, and fight the boldest when they cope with shadows.

We do not live in an age when it is necessary to wage war with tyranny ; to extort compliances, and to extend powers, in order to counterbalance despotic authority. In former times, and for these purposes, such a conduct might be justified. But we live in an age when these purposes have been attain-

abandoned, and the object of the armament in some measure relinquished. Where is the constitutional ground of complaint ?

ed, and when there is a tendency to the opposite extreme; when we have more to dread from licentiousness than despotism; when the powers of the Crown are diminished, while those of the Commons remain in full force. Here then is the danger to the Constitution: what was formerly its defence may be employed for its destruction: what were intended only as salutary checks may become in their turns despotic powers.

We live in an age when the authority of Government is so little dreaded, that the Crown, and the person of the King, are abused with a wantonness and impunity, at which virtue blushes from shame, and loyalty from indignation. We live in an age in which the Constitution we have so long valued is not only vilified and abused, but we are told with equal effrontery and folly, that we have no Constitution, because it has grown up into its present form, and was not founded at once upon a popular convention. We live in an age when all subordination, and all distinctions of rank and honour are laughed at, and when theories suited only to ideal beings, are promulgated as systems of government for
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mankind. We live in an age when these doctrines are embraced with spirit, and propagated with zeal ; when pulpits, clubs, and seminaries of education, are converted into thrones of sedition, divans of conspiracy, and nurseries of rebellion : when infamous libels are daily issuing from the presses, in which the sacred names of liberty and virtue are profaned to cover the most insolent and unmerited abuse : when literary journals are become the vehicles of democratic enthusiasm ; when the fountains of criticism are polluted, and their currents diverted to poison the minds of the ignorant and the unwary—to overwhelm the labours of every friend to the present establishment, and to break down the barriers of order, loyalty, and obedience.

In such an age, the intentions of the Society may be good, but they cannot be wise. Whatever has a tendency in the slightest degree to countenance democratic opinions, or to facilitate rebellious attempts, ought, more particularly at the present season, to be firmly resisted by every friend to the mixed government of his country. It is not, perhaps,

haps, too much to assert, after the foregoing examination, that the views of the Society, as far as we can infer them from their original proceedings, are erroneous in theory, dangerous in practice, and unsuitable in time.

From that aristocracy to which a nation ought to look up with respect—from an aristocracy, not merely of rank, but of honour, of property, of information, of ability, of worth, do the lovers of the British Constitution expect its defence and preservation. To aristocracy are the people of England indebted for that liberty which they fondly cherish, and aristocracy alone can prevent its dangerous excess. This much-injured and much-insulted order is destined to be the saviour of the state. It is the happy medium between despotism and anarchy. It wrested the charter of freedom from the grasp of a tyrant, and it will guard the sceptre of authority in the hands of a constitutional King.

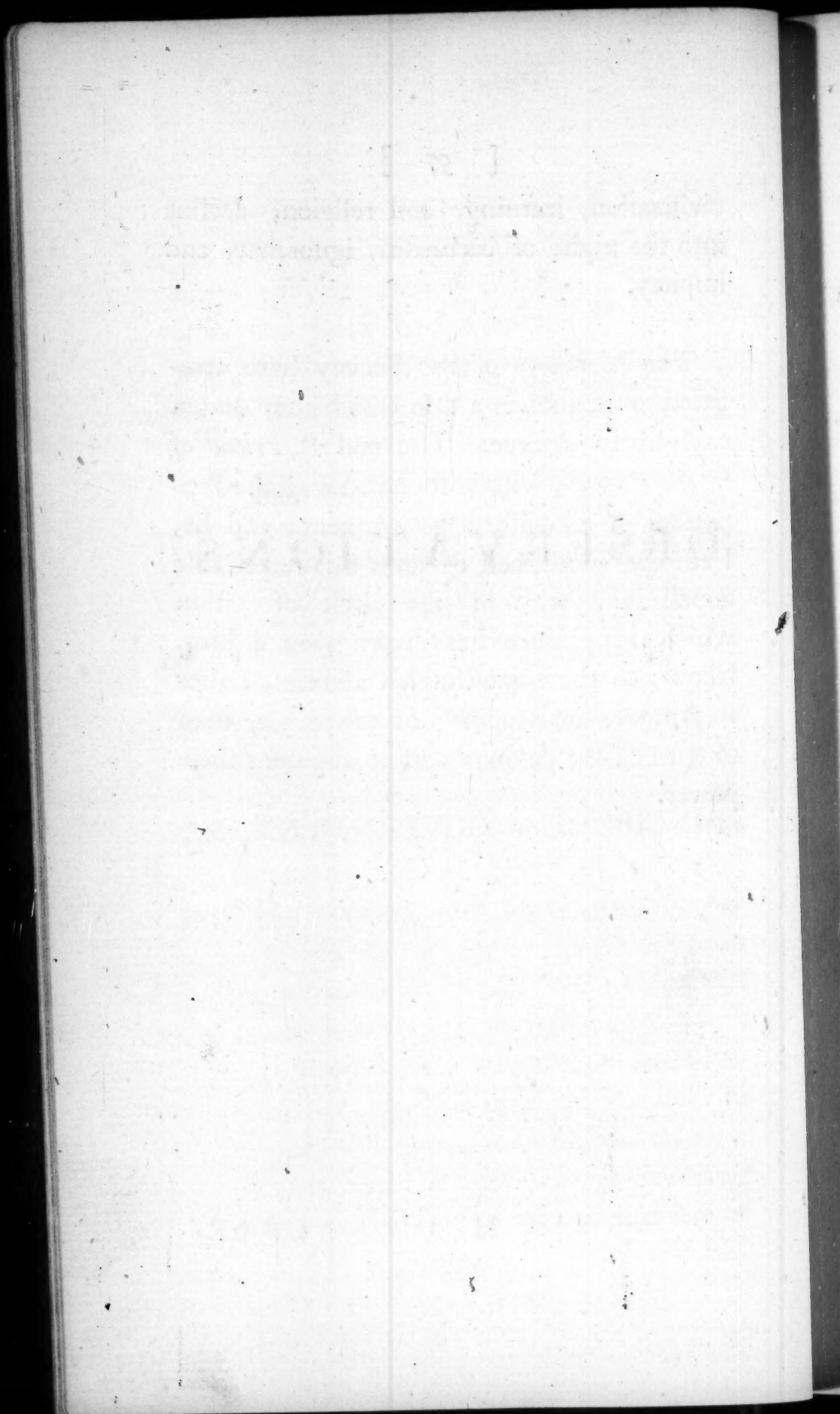
From such an aristocracy we may expect a strenuous opposition to the measures of the reforming Society. When a host is advancing

cing to the attack, we must stop the progress of those who would act as the pioneers of their camp. When a fortress is besieged, it is necessary to guard the ramparts. If the out-works of the constitution are thrown down, it may be difficult to defend the citadel.

I would by no means insinuate, that all the adversaries of our present Government are instigated by corrupt motives. God forbid that I should reason so weakly, or so harshly judge! Great allowances also are to be made for the prejudices of education, the habit of sentiment, the natural enthusiasm for liberty, the triumph excited by a neighbouring revolution, and the resentment of disappointed ambition at home. But while he esteems or excuses many of the individuals, it is highly necessary for every good subject to guard against the party. Their doctrines are before the world, and their wishes and designs have been prematurely disclosed. It is incumbent on every Englishman to withstand their progress, who would not wish to see tumults and commotions excited through the country, and the deluded people suffering for their crimes; or to see the present day of
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civilization, learning, and religion, decline into the night of barbarism, ignorance, and impiety.

The Members of the Society have arrogated to themselves a title which they do not exclusively deserve. The real "*Friend of the People*" will be found among the supporters of established government; and he, I am convinced, best deserves this respectable appellation, who in the circle of action which Providence has drawn around him, labours to the utmost of his abilities, rather to promote the happiness of the people, than to flatter their passions and to augment their power.



OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT, &c.

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PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT

Many of the remarks in this volume have been more fully advanced and supported in publications which have appeared since this volume was first published. The author thanks the public for the attention which has been bestowed upon it.

OBSERVATIONS, &c.

LETTER II.

DEAR SIR,

THE following essay, to which I have now given the form of a letter addressed to you, was written more than a year ago. It was undertaken as a self-appointed exercise on politics, when the new theories of government first issued from the box of a modern Pandora.

Many of the remarks it contains have, doubtless, been more forcibly advanced, and more ably supported in publications which were not in existence when this essay was written. But as the author thinks he has

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taken up the subject on different grounds, and, perhaps, treated it in a different manner; from most of the writers on the same side of the question, he considers himself as justified in publishing it at a time when the cause of truth and order requires the co-operation even of the feeblest aid.

In his former letter the author sheltered himself, in some measure, behind the ramparts of authority; in this he has ventured out into the field: yet he wishes not so much to attack as to defend; to conquer as to convince.

There are, probably, many well meaning persons who imagine that those who are held up to their notice as luminaries of the age, are right in the opinions they so boldly maintain on the nature of government; who yet, from motives of expediency, or from a sense of duty, yield a ready obedience to that constitution under which they live. To such good subjects and good men I would submit the following observations. If authority on the one hand, and duty on the other, be left out of the question, they may yet be found
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more consistent with the principles of the British Constitution than with any fanciful diagram or theoretical scheme, which affects to be founded on the Rights of Man.

I HAVE always been instructed since I was able to learn, and have always thought since I was capable of reasoning, that all extremes were to be avoided by the lover of truth: that they always presented to our view, evils opposite, indeed, in nature, but similar in degree; and that the arguments of philosophers and divines in all ages in favour of the golden mean, were neither fallacious nor absurd.

I have always conceived that absolute monarchy and democracy were two extremes in government; the one tending to tyranny, the other to licentiousness, and that virtue, wisdom, truth, and happiness, lay in the mean between them.

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I have always imagined, that by the skilful admixture of three different powers, the British Constitution had arrived much nearer practical perfection, than any other form of government.

I have always entertained some veneration for the opinions of my ancestors, and the maxims of preceding ages. I have always considered those doctrines as suspicious which flatter the licentious propensities of the multitude, and which are readily embraced by the riotous, the ignorant, and the profligate.

But the assertors of the pretended Rights of Man shock all these prepossessions of the mind. They trample upon those forms which time and reflection have rendered venerable: they laugh at those opinions which wisdom and experience have sanctioned: they abuse all controul as tyranny, and stigmatize all subordination as meanness.

Can such doctrines be true? God and reason forbid! Let not their affected plainness be considered as the garb of truth. The gross
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conceptions of the vulgar are as distant from wisdom, as the refined ideas of the fanciful.

But I wish not to prejudge; on the contrary, it is my desire to examine, by some test, the truth or fallacy of those maxims on government, which are adopted as the foundation of their moral systems by the pretended reformers of the world. Unless those maxims are erroneous, the consequences deduced from them cannot be wrong.

For this purpose I shall endeavour to trace the subject to its fountain-head, without taking these officious politicians for my guides, and when I have discovered its source, and accompanied its progress, I shall leave it to the world to determine whether the currents of new opinions are derived from a pure spring, or run in a proper direction.

The science of politics is in a great degree a practical one. It includes a multitude of complex and mutable subjects. It depends on the union and the balance of a variety of interests, and changes its operations as any one of those interests appears to preponderate;

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but every wise scheme of politics must be founded on some certain general principles, and to ascertain those principles ought to be the first study of the statesman.

I feel no reluctance to an inquiry of this nature. It is impossible to reason on any facts, or to draw any conclusions, without a recurrence to fundamental truths. No establishment can be supported, no reformation can be justified, but from its consistency with them. That system cannot be defended which will not bear to be discussed.

The evils which have been attributed by some writers to abstract disquisitions, ought, in my opinion, only to be charged on their improper conduct and application. An abstract proposition is a general truth. It is a deduction of reason from a comprehensive view of a subject, with all its attributes and accidents involved. It must exist independent of all possible varieties in the object of its examination. It is incapable of change, but with the nature of that object. Thus general, perfect, and immutable, it becomes in

in each particular case, the ground of our reasoning, and the basis of our resolutions.

In developing the principles of good government, we must define its nature, its spring, and its object, in order to ascertain those permanent powers which it ought to possess. And in reasoning on established systems we may safely refer for direction to those elementary truths, which, (in all the windings and the darkness of an intricate subject, perplexed by the different origins, interests, and plans of existing governments, and the various customs, inclinations, and distinctions of man,) will still afford a clue to unravel our difficulties, and a light to direct our research.

Government, then, in a good and general sense, is the proper regulation of man in civil society:—its object is the happiness of that society:—its spring the wants of the individuals who compose it. But before we can discover the best form of government, the means by which it must attain its end, and the manner in which it should be actuated

by its spring, we must first consider the nature of the being to be governed.

Man is a rational and a religious being. But though reason and religion are his distinctions, they are not his motives, his incentives. He is subject to a variety of passions as well as appetites, which through every stage of life actuate his conduct, and define his character. To dilate upon this subject would be only to echo the sermons of the preacher, the satires of the poet, and the declamations of the moralist. It is sufficient to my argument that the sermon, the satire, and the declamation, would prove the truth of the remark.

Passions are the springs of human action. They excite the hopes, animate the endeavours, and encourage the perseverance of man. Without them a human creature would be an inactive and a negative being, incapable of virtue or vice. But to ensure the happiness of the individual and of society, the passions of man must be subject to controul. Reason is given to discern their proper object, and to prevent their excesses. In
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the hour of deliberation it may frequently be a just and unbiaſſed judge, but in the moment of action, it is commonly a weak and ineffectual opponent. With the generality of men it is too often degraded from the maſter into the ſlave of their inclinations. Religion is the only certain controuler of human paſſions ;—it is the only due balance of their weight ;—the only power which can counteract their influence. But even this exalted ſentiment does not deſtroy them ; it only regulates, and reſtrains, and directs them to higher objects, and to nobler ends. Reaſon and religion united have their full effect on ſome minds, and ſuperſede the neceſſity of other reſtraints ; but on the majority of mankind, they have no certain influence, no conſtant operation.

The advocates for popular government have more lofty ideas of humanity. Contemplating man ſolely as a rational being, they conſider him as fully capable of ſelf-regulation, and, therefore, argue that he ought not to be controuled by exterior power. But if their baſis be unſound, the ſplendid theories

ries which are built upon it must tumble into the dust.

A good government will have respect to every principle in the nature of man. It will consider his passions as the general springs of his conduct. It will, therefore, allow them a certain scope, and provide proper objects for their gratification, but at the same time it will render their gratification subservient to the interests of the community. In its regulations it will consult the dictates of reason, and in its sanctions the authority of religion. It will then be natural, and wise, and good. It will not depend on the wills of the multitude any more than on the will of an individual. For if its end would be defeated in the one case, its nature would be destroyed in the other. In both it would be rendered subordinate to the passions of men.

Government, therefore, should not only regard, in some measure, those permanent properties in which all men agree, but it should be adapted likewise to those distinguishing qualities in which they differ.

It is the fashionable tenet of the present day, that all men are equal, that they all possess the same rights, and ought all to enjoy the same advantages. Those who entertain this opinion of mankind; those who believe them equal by nature, and under the direction of reason, are justified in considering a pure democracy as the only defensible form of government. But though a tenet of this kind, under the specious appearance of equity, has become the favourite doctrine of the age, I can by no means subscribe to its truth. In what sense can it be asserted that all men are equal? The most zealous republican will allow, that in no civilized state on the face of the globe, whatever its form of government may be, this equality does actually subsist. But abstracting as much as possible from artificial distinctions, and considering the human race in their most uncivilized, and what is generally called their natural, state; with what semblance of propriety can it be affirmed, that they are equal? Are they equal in strength, in beauty, in stature, in health, in wisdom, in virtue? All these are the qualities of men, but they are qualities which all men do not possess in equal degree. Strength
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of body and strength of mind are the greatest blessings of humanity ; but of these there are innumerable modifications from the most exalted state of power and wisdom, down to the mere negation of corporeal and mental debility. It would be puerile to maintain that men are born equal, because they come into the world in a similar state of imbecility. I grant that at the moment of birth the distinctions of mankind are not so obvious, neither do they prevail in so great a degree, but the seeds of those distinctions exist even at that period, and if all the powers of man cannot prevent the infant race from becoming unequal, as it advances to maturity, it is scarcely fair to assert, that men are equal by nature, because at the moment of their birth they approach nearer to equality than at any future period.

I confess, it appears to me as easy to prove that mankind are born perfectly alike in features and in colour, as that they are born perfectly equal in any sense in which that term is generally understood.

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It has lately been asserted, that though men differ in other respects, they are still equal in political importance. It is much easier to advance such an opinion than to explain it. From whence do they derive this equality of political importance? From God or man? Not from God, for he has given to men unequal powers; not from man, for from the creation of the world down to the present *illuminated* age, men have always felt and acted on the sense of inequality.

In a state of barbarism, the qualifications of the body are the great sources of distinction. These will enable the possessor to acquire an ascendancy over his fellow-creatures, and to attain peculiar advantages for himself. In a state of civilization, the talents of the mind will ensure superiority, and produce essential differences between man and man. But whether in a barbarous or a polished state, the inequality of mankind is alike founded in nature, and alike obvious to impartial investigation.

To this inequality, however primarily occasioned, must the frame of government be adapted. To the intention of Providence it

must submit. As well might the politician endeavour to change the skin of the Ethiopian, or the spots of the leopard, as to abolish the distinctions which nature and accident are perpetually producing in the human race. In the earliest stages of civil society, superior courage and prowess established dominion, and attained honours and rewards. In its more advanced periods, superior talents and industry acquire the largest portions of wealth—wealth once acquired produces leisure—leisure gives birth to the acquisition of knowledge, and knowledge leads its possessor to dignity and power. Most of these advantages will necessarily be transmitted to posterity without the demand of additional labour or continued exertion. This is the natural progress of the human faculties. If government cannot annihilate this tendency, it ought not to counteract its effects. It cannot destroy the right which man possesses to make use of the advantages which God has given him, without destroying the nature of man. It cannot produce apparent equality without real injustice,—without relaxing the nerves of industry, and breaking the spring of occupation. Wealth, and the attainments to which it gives birth, are the security of all civilized states; but who would labour to acquire

quire wealth under that government, which in its zeal to preserve the equality of mankind, throws back the property thus acquired into a common fund, and divides the advantages which only some of its members were capable or desirous of attaining, amongst those who were not so well qualified, or so strongly disposed to labour?

It is undoubtedly rational, and wise, and just, that all men should be equally secure in what they possess, and equally free to enjoy what they can attain. But this equal inequality (if I may be allowed the expression) is a *civil* not a *natural* right; for in a state of nature the rights of superior strength would never suffer the weak to enjoy even the shadow of security.

A good government will not make arbitrary distinctions among mankind, nor will it overlook, neglect, or abolish, the distinctions which Heaven has made. If government be conformed to the nature of man, it will neither place its scepter in the hands of a despot, nor consign it to the grasp of a multitude. Leaving the avenues to superiority open to

the great body of the people, it will make that superiority which some only can attain, the ground work of its system of regulation. It will give security to property, that its possessors may be interested in the welfare of the state: to reflective wisdom and experience, the immediate result of study and practice, and the ultimate consequence of a competent fortune, and an exemption from corporeal employments, it will assign the chief task of legislation, and the principal functions of jurisprudence: on approved integrity in office, on exalted talents in civil or military occupations, on characters of weight and influence in the country, either from the hereditary descent of large property, or the native possession of high ability and acknowledged worth, it will confer titles and honours: and it will expect in return a cautious deliberation in legislative and judicial affairs, the support of government, and the resistance of popular licentiousness. It will invest its executive power with dignity and strength, while it secures it from being the instrument of injustice, or the object of competition. And it will overrule and balance these distinctions by the authority of religion, which can alone

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humble the lofty, and console the low, abate the pride of superiority, and dignify the humility of submission.—Subject to this controul, the disproportionate advantages, which are the fruits of disproportionate endowments, will best promote that industry and subordination which are essential to the welfare of society.

In such a state, man is not drugged with the anodyne of equality; he is roused by the stimulant of distinction. He exerts all his faculties. He finds their exertion sanctioned and rewarded. He loves his country, and he adorns it.

A government conducted on these principles, will naturally be composed of the several orders of a monarchy, a nobility, a senate, a magistracy, and a church. The power of these several orders—the combination and balance of some, and the independence of others, are subsequent considerations. They must depend either on the primary form of a constitution, founded on these ideas, or on the different alterations suggested by sagacity and experience to correct

rect the errors of original construction.—On these subjects I mean not to enter more fully into a detail. It was my intention to confine myself, in this letter, entirely to elementary truths, and could I believe that my arguments were of sufficient importance, I should be content with having illustrated the position which I have endeavoured to establish,—that the wills of the multitude and the equality of mankind are not the proper foundations nor correctives of government.

From contemplating the form of an institution designed for the regulation of man in civil society, I am naturally led to consider the end of that regulation. And this is the permanent happiness of the community; by happiness, in the present instance, I certainly do not mean the paradise of fools, a state of unmixed gratification, the object of fancy, pursuit, and disappointment, but the exemption from those evils, and the possession of that good, which human wisdom can foresee, prevent, or procure.

The happiness of a society must depend on the virtue, as well as the privileges, of its mem-

members. Vice is incompatible with solid satisfaction in the individual, and it is productive of certain evils to the community. Public (as well as private) happiness does not arise from the indulgence of every desire and the exertion of every power, but from the conformity of wishes and actions to the dictates of eternal truth.—It is immutable in its nature, virtuous in its principle, and permanent in its duration.

The arguers of the present age seem to consider the establishment of freedom alone as the proper object of government; but freedom is no more than a mean for obtaining this object, and so far only a necessary mean, as it is consistent with virtue and subject to regulation.

Freedom is the spring of vice, as well as the source of satisfaction.—Restraint is the protector of virtue, as well as the destroyer of comfort.—Neither freedom nor restraint, therefore, are good, but under certain limitations; nor bad, except in their extremes.

Abso-

Absolute freedom in an individual has a tendency to render him both a slave and a tyrant ; a slave to his inclinations, and a tyrant to his fellow creatures. In a community it cannot exist ; because the contention and opposition of the several members must effectually repress its operations, and it cannot be exercised by one without being destroyed in another.—Freedom must, therefore, be limited, before it can be generally possessed. Independent of law, the liberty of a nation is an empty sound.

Without security in his person and property, without a power of acting as he pleases in every point not injurious to the welfare of a fellow citizen, and the interests of society, no man can be said to enjoy the materials of happiness. Such a security and freedom it should be the object of every government to ensure.—But in this sense, and in every signification in which it is connected with government, freedom cannot be enjoyed without public and personal restraint. General freedom is the effect of restraint in every individual ; particular freedom is the consequence of general restraint.

When

When men entered into civil society, they surrendered powers in order to obtain advantages :—they surrendered the power of doing what they pleased with a probability of opposition, for the advantages of doing what was right and innocent with an exemption from controul : they surrendered to the deliberative wisdom of government the power of determining what was just and lawful, (consistent with the general welfare of the community) and they surrendered to the established authority of government the power of enforcing the one and securing the other, by obliging each individual to perform what is just, and by preventing all other individuals from interrupting him in the performance of what is lawful. It is of no importance to say that men never formally surrendered powers or stipulated for advantages. While they continue to live under any government, they tacitly acknowledge its authority, and look for its protection.

The general freedom, therefore, which is consistent with virtue, and conducive to happiness, is not a natural but an artificial freedom. It does not arise from the nature of

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man. It results from the powers of government. To the wisdom and authority of this institution we must look for its continuance, and support. If government secures to its subjects the liberty of doing, with impunity, all that a wise and virtuous man could wish to do, it secures all the liberty which is necessary to a nation. The possession of more cannot be demanded without arrogance, nor conceded without danger. And yet the natural desire of obtaining a more absolute freedom, the natural love of self-judgement and self-direction is the frequent source of bickering and contention between the government and the people. Every man is perfectly satisfied that others should be deprived of the power of injuring himself, but he wishes for no restraint on his own inclinations, that even his virtuous actions may be the consequence of choice and not of authority. The desire of independence is common to all men. They unite with ardour in the wish and struggle to attain it. They appear to be animated but by one spirit, and *liberty* becomes the watchword of the people. But blinded by enthusiasm, or actuated by cunning, they too often overlook or conceal

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from each other the necessity of that general discipline, from which each man is secretly endeavouring to emancipate himself,

Reflection must convince the unprejudiced that unless mankind were constantly actuated by virtue ;—unless they were totally different from what they are, the general attainment of independence must be subversive of the very liberty it proposes to increase. But self-love is ever at war with wisdom.

As the only rational end of an established government is the permanent happiness of the society for which it was established, the pursuit of this end ought to be secure to the people by some wise and definite means. But whatever means are employed for this purpose, the enthusiastic desire of liberty alone ought never to controul its operations. Government should be perfectly dispassionate in all its proceedings——

“ *Non civium ardor*——

“ *Non vultus instantis tyranni,*”

should be its constant motto and its rule—for it is bound only to respect the inclinations

of men in subserviency to the eternal laws of justice, virtue, and religion.

From this inquiry into the nature and end of government, I think we may discover, that, though the wills of the multitude are not the proper basis of its frame, nor the best conductors of its execution, yet the real wants and rational wishes of man ought to be its constant guide and actuating principle.

Man is a gregarious animal. His superior faculties and powers are only called forth into exertion by an intercourse with the rest of his species. A state of nature, if it means any thing, as applied to man, must mean a state of society without laws; for it is almost impossible to consider men as abstracted individuals, living apart from each other in solitude and silence. But though men associate in a state of nature, yet they live in a kind of jealousy and fear, which subtracts from the blessings of society. In a state of civilization, on the contrary, they combine to enjoy the benefit of united strength and wisdom, to be regulated by laws, to obtain advantages, to relieve their wants, and to secure

cure their possessions. As soon as they have entered into civil society, as soon as they have submitted to be controuled, their rights commence. Right appears to me to be the offspring of regulation—the creature of government. In a natural state, men were possessed of no rights at all.—None can be called natural rights which are not possessed in a state of nature ; and where the rules of justice are not established, where the strong can enforce obedience, and the weak must yield to oppression, what become of the *Rights of Man* ? They exist in no certain or tangible form. They are shadows only which flit before the eyes of the speculatist, but vanish at the dawn of examination.—Were we to consider right and power as synonymous, we should lose sight of justice and equity at once ; and it would still be absurd to talk of the rights of men as equal, when their powers were enjoyed in different degrees, or to consider them as general, when they were frequently possessed by some at the expence of others.

It was a sense of the insufficiency of their natural abilities to prevent evils and to attain security ; it was a sense of weakness, and not
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a conviction of power, which drove men to seek an asylum under the protection of government : under this protection their natural powers are relinquished, and their civil rights begin ; they have then a right to enjoy the good for the attainment of which they entered into society. For the concession of possible, but uncertain freedom and power ; for the exertions of labour, and ingenuity, and wisdom, they have a right to all the advantages which government can bestow and insure ; they have a right to those acquisitions which their talents will enable them to attain ; they have a right to protection and security, to instruction and relief ; to the regulation which may promote virtue, prevent oppression, and establish peace. These are the rights of men in civil society, because they are the result of a compact, either expressed or implied, between the people and the powers of government ; but they are only rights so long as the condition of the compact is observed. Government, on the other hand, has an equal right to submission and obedience from the people, and to the exertions of industry and wisdom in its favour : the rights of the governor and the governed are ever re-

reciprocal: the rights of the one are the duties of the other, and which-ever side fails in its duty, by that failure annihilates its rights.

As the people, conscious of their inability to relieve their own wants, and obtain their own wishes, surrendered their powers of judging and acting for themselves into the hands of government, government has a permanent right to the possession of these powers, in order to promote the ends for which they were conceded. But as government is invested with authority solely for the benefit of the people, the people have an equal right to insist, that the end of its institution be implicitly pursued.

This is the true ground of popular power, and this is its determinate object; government may, undoubtedly, be perverted from its original design; it may neglect the interests which it should exist only to secure: unless it hears the complaints, receives the petitions, and is acquainted with the wants of the people, it cannot be invariably directed to the promotion of their happiness.

If government, therefore, to insure the execution of its purposes, must possess an immediate controul over the people, the people, to prevent an improper exercise of its authority, must possess a correlative influence on government.

These powers would naturally destroy each other, if they were not balanced in the nicest equipoise: the constitution in which they are thus balanced deserves to be a pattern to the world.

The popular influence to which I have alluded, must be attained by representation, by inquiry, by remonstrance, by the legal punishment of corrupt responsible agents; it must be supported by the permanent establishment of laws, which may give security in possession, freedom in action, and relief from injury; it must be assisted by the general maintenance of religion, which proclaims to all who are distinguished from their fellow citizens by office or endowments, that they are accountable for the use and abuse of the talents with which they entrusted.

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It is for these reasons that a public institution of religion should be supported in every country, and that its authority should be considered as the basis of moral and political conduct; it is for these reasons that certain rules of action, and boundaries of power, should be defined by the wisdom and experience of the nation, and solemnly ratified and confirmed by the sacred engagement of the sovereign; it is for these reasons that the voice of the people ought to be heard in every good constitution; that their delegates, as connected with them, should state their wishes and complaints, and, as connected with the government, should deliberate and decide on their propriety; it is for these reasons, that while a supreme power and a permanent council should be instituted to preserve the frame of government, and to secure its execution; to impose hazard on innovation, and prudence on reform; that a House of Commons should likewise be established, to give the proper spring to the functions of government, and confine its operations to their original intent.

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These appear to me, from a careful examination of the subject, to be the true principles of government ; a nation regulated by these principles is free, and ought to be happy. Few constitutions, indeed, have ever been erected on these foundations, and the form deducible from them must generally be attained by long experience and multiplied improvements. But, perhaps, it may be considered as a wise dispensation of Providence, that most of the establishments in the world have arisen from a different source ; first, because the natural weakness of man renders it almost impossible for the united wisdom of a nation to create a perfect constitution for itself ; to obtain every theoretical advantage without producing many inevitable evils : and, secondly, because the power and permanency which are necessary to a government are much better secured by an arbitrary origin than by a popular convention. The power which has been granted must have been first possessed ; and such is the fascination of power, that when it has once been enjoyed, it is liable to be revoked.

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Where a constitution, then, has gradually risen to a state conformable to these principles, it is the first duty of the statesman to defend it against open hostility, rash alterations, and secret attacks ; some imperfections it must necessarily have, or it would be more than human ; but a true patriot and a good man will rather be disposed to live at peace, to rejoice and be grateful under the protection of such a government, than to magnify its defects, and expose its errors to the world ; he will be thankful for the shelter of the oak, though some drops from an inclement sky may penetrate its foliage ; he will revere its grandeur and admire its beauty, though some few withered boughs may be intermingled with its vigorous branches.

Where the evils of a government, on the other hand, preponderate, and a high degree of good is not to be expected from its present form, it is the statesman's duty to alter and amend it. But, however commendable it may be to alter what is corrupt, and to amend what is imperfect, the alteration and amendment must be conducted on other

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principles than the all-sufficient reason, the original equality, the absolute freedom, and the natural rights of man.

I rise from this research with greater veneration than ever for the British Constitution. In ascertaining the proper foundations of Government, its system has suggested both the rule and the example. It would be unnecessary to enter into a detail of its different powers and institutions; it is sufficient to the object of this present Letter to have examined its outline under the contemplation of abstracted principles.

When I reflect on this wonderful Constitution, on a Constitution which has incorporated into its frame the only three forms of government which were ever acknowledged as legitimate by the sages of antiquity; which has adopted and balanced those different energies of action, which are necessary in moderation, but dangerous in extreme: when I reflect on the wisdom and experience it has attained, like individuals, from the succession of years and the steadiness of
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application ; on the fiery ordeals it has passed ; on the numerous failures it has surmounted, and the successive improvements it has adopted, till it rose at length to be the object of envy and the model of imitation to the world, in spite of the fashionable tenets of the age and the daring spirit of revolution, while it continues as effectually as it has hitherto done, to promote the happiness and insure the prosperity of the nation, from the ardent impulse of my heart, and the firm conviction of my understanding, I echo, with Blackstone, the petition of Paolo,

“ Eſto perpetua ! ”

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